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Ideology in the French translation of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's children's books

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Chapter II

Ideology & Translation in Children's books

The present chapter attempts to link *ideology, language and translation*. This will enable us to understand how sometimes the translation of a text depends on the ideology hidden in language through discourse.

2.1 Language, Ideology, and translation

Reading Claramonte (2003), we see that the interaction between ideology and translation is of interest to many contemporary authors, who tackle it from different perspectives. André Lefevere's now classic 1992 publication *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* is particularly useful. Other texts that Lefevere wrote with Susan Bassnett, such as *Constructing Cultures* in 1998 are also relevant to this analysis, as well as texts such as those by Edwin Gentzler, Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Rosemary Arroj, Lawrence Venuti, Mona Baker (especially her article '*Linguistics and Cultural Studies*' [1996], Basil Hatim, Ian Mason, Christian Schäffner (in particular *Discourse and Ideologies* [1996] or Theo Hermans (from *The manipulation of Literature* [1985] to *Translation in System* [1999a]). All these works present different opinions, but ratify the importance of ideology in translating. (For more details see Claramonte in Perez's *Apropos of Ideology*, 2003:71).

Let us first take a closer look at the issue of language that runs through the issues of translation, ideology and literature, placing particular emphasis on the relationship between power and translation. If language is understood as a basis from which a society experiences itself and others, Ngugi's literature as part of postcolonial literature entails seizing power of the language he uses.

Connections between language, power and ideology are far more complex issues than they may seem to be. The more aware the translator is of these complexities, the better the translator will be. This chapter is, thus, concerned with the attempt to develop a more adequate intellectual framework for understanding the general principles involved in relating *children's literature (language)* and *ideology* to *translation*. It highlights the importance of language for an understanding of issues of social and professional concern

and it is an analytical frame for researching translation and language (of text) in relation to power and ideology.

Schäffner exploits the relationship between ideology and translation in a way that enables us to understand how the two concepts are related to each other. She argues that

> the relationship between ideology and translation is *multifarious.* Any translation may be reproduced as ideological since the choice of a source text and the use to which the subsequent target text is put is determined by the *interests, aims,* and *objectives of social agents.* But ideological aspects can also be determined *within a text itself*, both at the lexical and grammatical levels (Schäffner, 2003: 23).

This interconnection is one that Kress and Hodge (1979) explain in a very simple way. They state:

> Language is an instrument of control as well as of communication. Linguistic forms allow significance to be conveyed and to be distorted. In this way hearers can be both manipulated and informed, preferably manipulated while they suppose they are being informed. Language is ideological in another, more political, sense of that word: it involves systematic distortion in the service of class interest…Political ideology is liable to project fantasy versions of reality, but science deals in hypothetical constructs whose status is not always so very different (Kress & Hodge, 1979:6)

Kress and Hodge's observation here is acute. They assume that language is linked to power (ideology). They seem to share the same point of view as Fairclough (1995a) who also argues that language used through the media (literature and so on) never presents an event or a phenomenon in a neutral way. It follows that those ideological factors and power relations always go hand in hand with their presentations. What is essential to us in this debate is the discovery of the fact that since ideologies function in language in a form of *power relations*, it is necessary for translators to be aware of these (ideologies) in their rendering of messages from one form of language to another.

2.2 Ideology and discourse

Ideology affects the '*discourse*' of the text and language in a broad sense. The notion of discourse is tied up to that of ideology. In fact, Foucault eventually dropped the use of ideology for his preferred term, "discourse."(1977:205-206). "Texts are [clearly] given form and meaning by discourses" (Kress, 1985:31). Kress argues that texts are the product of individual speakers who, as social agents, are themselves formed in discourses through texts, attempting to make sense of competing, contradictory demands and claims of differing discourses. The point Kress makes here is that there are discursive differences within a text or texts (either in one text by one author or different authors), which differences (at linguistic, semantic or syntactic levels) are negotiated, governed by differences in power encoded or determined by the same discourses. This is what makes texts into sites of struggle, and as sites of struggle, they are the sites of linguistic and cultural change. Individuals, as social agents constructed in discourse, are the bearers and agents of that struggle, he concludes. This makes us believe that without a deep understanding of discourses in a text, the translator is likely to mistranslate the text.

To understand Ngugi's use of ideology through discourse, it is first essential to know something about the classification of ideologies. Generally speaking, people assume that there are positive and negative ideologies. The positive ones are suggested by Van Djik to be "systems that sustain and legitimise opposition and resistance to domination and social inequality" (Van Djik, 2003:6) called such positive or oppositional ideologies "utopias" (Karl Mannhem quoted in Van Djik, 2003:6). Among these, we have ideologies such as feminism, anti-racism and others. Ideologies developed by Ngugi in his writing against colonialism, as described in chapter I can be considered as part of these positive ideologies. African writers like Ngugi, Achebe, Sonyinka and so on were responding in their writing to the discourse of colonialism. They wrote against dominance and hegemony such as Christian hegemony. The irony, however, as Van Dijk puts it wisely, is that "Anti ideologies, such as those of anti-racism, thus are not just opposing racism and racist ideologies, but have their own (e.g. humanitarian) ideology – just as feminist ideologies are not just anti-sexist" (Van Djik, 2003:6). This makes us believe that ideologies are not only negative because they are dominant, for even non-dominant ideologies can still be negative. A religion can also be considered negative if it uses other forms of power abuse (violence

or dominance) indirectly. If we consider a case, for example, of a church which is opposed by atheists and dissenting organisations, within those conflicts, words and hymns can be used by each group as weapons of struggle. This is what Ngugi does in his literature. He uses African songs to convey his message to the colonial masters. That is why we need to be able to identify and analyse power abuse critically in any discourses in order to determine to what degree they are positive or negative, if they are to be considered for further public consumption.

"Discourses", however, "differ with the kinds of institutions and social practices in which they take shape, and within the positions of those who speak and those whom they address" (Macdonell, 1986:1). The fields, as Macdonell observes, are not homogenous. The statement made, the words used and their meanings depend on where and against what the statement and words are made.

Such a study on discourse shows how discourse is used in society. Though we have different sort of discourses, they all have effects on society because of the political relations in which they take shape and the positions held by those who use them. A study of discourse also helps to understand the ideologies behind various institutions as described in the previous chapter. From a linguistic point of view, Brown and Yule (1983), for instance, help us to understand that hearers and speakers can use the same discourse to make reference or inference, to presuppose or imply. Furthermore, such work on discourses finds part of its function in its ability to unmask for the translator ideologies and knowledges that arise from the various institutions and classes that divide our society. Thus, the discussion below examines discursive dimensions of ideologies to show how ideologies may be expressed or concealed in discourse, reproduced in society, and how ideologies may be dealt with in translation.

2.3. Interpretation of discourse in Ngugi's Children's books

Ideology and power relations are very important issues in the translation of children's books. However, it has been observed that children's literature is generally seen as a peripheral and uninteresting object of study despite the role it plays as an educational, social and ideological instrument. Tiina Puurtinen argues that "the translation of children's literature has attracted even less scholarly attention, yet these translations are bound to have a significant effect on the way children experience literature, and the language of translated texts may have some bearing on their language development and acceptance of ideas" (Puurtinen, 1998:1). Maybe this results from some peoples' opinion according to which, as Klingberg writes, "children's books are bound to the country in which they are written, therefore, they should not be translated" (Klingberg, 1978:132). Klingberg does not subscribe himself to this view. Similarly, Astrid Lindgren argues that "children have a marvellous ability to experience the most alien and distant things and circumstances, *if a good translator* is there to help them, and we believe [she argues] that their imagination continues to build where the translator can go no further" (Lindgren in Klingberg, 1978:132 *emphasis ours*).

Because of the complex nature of prose, the meaning behind discourse can easily pass unnoticed. It is thus the duty of the critic to unravel the meaning hidden in the discourse. An examination of images used in the narratives will highlight the social values that the author is intentionally passing on to his readers.

In light of the fact that the images (ideologies) the author chooses to use are bound to affect the reading children either negatively or positively, it is essential that critics or translators of children's literature give time and serious thought to the ideologies or images embedded in the discourse. The problem is even more serious when translating books into another culture. If we consider the case of Ngugi's children's books, we will see that there will be inconsistency between what young French readers know and the images or ideologies encountered in Ngugi's African children's books. The young French readers will be confronted with images drawn from situations that are economically, socially, politically and geographically foreign. The conflict between the readers' tangible world and the experiences in it, and the world of the stories they read is bound to cause confusion. It is,

thus, the duty of the translator of the literary text to solve the impasse by a careful study of stories and evaluation of the messages and attitudes carrying these ideologies.

The point we want to make here is that the translator of children's literature often has to interpret ideologies embedded in discourse. These ideologies have the power to destroy or socialise children (i.e. help familiarize them with the cultural and social values of other peoples). Thus, the translator must do his work in such a way that he prevents these ideologies from having a negative effect on the children he is translating for.

John Bull, for example, is described in *Njamba Nene and the flying Bus* as

> "A small, dark boy with chubby cheeks and fat little legs and arms."
>
> (Ngugi, 1986b: 6)

This is "in Ngugi's diction a popular image [metaphor] of an over-fed, parasitic bourgeois" (Simatei, 1995:22). One can just take this statement for granted and translate it without thinking, yet it is loaded with ideological meaning. That is why Bourdieu in (Claramonte, 2003:78) would say that to translate ideology it is necessary to take into account the social conditions surrounding the production of discourses. They are messages from which to analyse the power inherent in language and also the type of authority or legitimacy supporting them.

By focusing on Ngugi's story of Njamba Nene who comes from a poor family as opposed to John Bull, a boy from a Gikuyu middle class family, a fruitful analysis can be achieved. The implications are clear: Njamba Nene is not well fed that is why he has small legs while his peer, John Bull, is healthy. The translator who is aware of this class conflict can successfully render this in a target language.

For those who are familiar with Ngugi' writing style and use of ideology, they will easily notice that the trope of violence is omnipresent in most of his novels. It is part of the author's discourse in his *Njamba Nene's Pistol.* We read, for instance, that:

> Suddenly Njamba Nene's heart skipped a beat and blood drained out of his face. "…Chief Kĩgorogoru was shot by Mau Mau terrorists in his home…he was shot through the mouth and he died instantly…It is reported that the terrorists first cut off his ears… (Ngugi, 1986a:3)

This quote from Ngugi portrays images of atrocity. Such discourse around issues of violence always raises questions among translators concerning their translation. This is so because of the ideological impact they have on the child reader. Some translators believe subjects such as war, violence, torture, sex, etc. should not be translated while others do not see any thing wrong with these issues as long as they are part of children's every day's experience. It is, indeed, difficult to determine whether the translator should translate or not translate such passages that could be seen as harmful for the child reader.

This discourse of violence suggests how important it is to understand the norms and values that govern our ideologies, to know how relevant or not they are for our society. These *values,* as Van Dijk argues, basically define what is good and bad, permitted and prohibited, and the fundamental aims to be striven after by individuals, groups and societies alike. Thus, he argues, freedom, independence, and autonomy may be values for groups, whereas intelligence, perseverance, or patience are typically values for people (Van Dijk, 2003:11). In some autobiographical children's books (e.g. Maxim Lionel's (1997). *Madiba, The Rainbow Man: the Story of Nelson Mandela* and many others) written for children in South Africa the values mentioned above are sufficiently explored. Such themes might be developed for a purpose. Perhaps the motive behind South African writers of children's books is to show to South African children that people like Nelson Mandela who fought against the apartheid system needed patience, tolerance, perseverance, and forgiveness to win their opponents over. They did so to preserve as much as possible the future hope of healing the community. Writing about the Mau Mau who fought against colonialism, Ngugi did not want to escape themes such as resistance, revolution or violence. But, if the reader is not careful enough he will think Ngugi is encouraging violence. Many people have erred by making general remarks like these, but Ngugi as a writer contrasts the good and bad of the groups, and it is left to us as readers to read between the lines to see these values of people (patience, intelligence, and beauty) and apply them. This is where we believe the translator, as a mediator of cultures, needs to adapt a text for his readers in a way that promotes these values.

That is why reading is an escapable issue in translation. A good translator must first be a good reader. Reading fiction critically is very important as pointed out by David Maughan-Brown who asserts that "fiction reveals or *renders visible* the structure of ideology within which it is produced". (Maughan-Brown, 1985: 106) In reading Ngugi's stories, we can decipher the author's main intention in narrating the Mau Mau story of violence. However, texts always generate *surplus* meanings that may subvert the purported intentions of the work. In reading the text the translator, as a reader himself, may come up with his own interpretation of the story or fail to acknowledge certain facts about the Mau Mau movement or fail to correctly render the message into the target language. One reader, for example, is likely to construct this act of violence in a way other than that intended by the original writer. S/he may perceive the above lines of the killing of Kĩgorogoru by the Mau Mau soldiers as based on the spirit of rebellion or revenge, while for another it may simply be seen as a legitimate fight i.e. fighting against traitors, the chief Kĩgorogoru being one of them. Each reader has his background when approaching a text, so what we think to be personal opinion is always something which is socially constructed. This is precisely why translators are often urged to have the sender's or writer's intention interpreted in such a way that his readers (children in this context) can perceive the reality of the source text. The translator needs to remind himself that both the language and the content of children's books are adjusted to readers' comprehension and reading abilities. This leads us to assume as well that "when children's books are translated, it may be necessary to make various adjustments in order to adhere to the notions of what is good and appropriate for children, as well as what is considered the suitable level of difficulty in a given target culture" (Puurtinen, 1998: 4). Claramonte understood the concept of translating ideology when he said that "translating ideology brings us to the translation of the sensitive and to the translation of the most intimate of the human being" (Claramonte, 2003:87).

This quote seems to suggest that the translation of ideology is a problematic area. The question, however, is, "should people stop translating such texts loaded with ideologies"? Of course, the translation of children's books is a fundamental challenge to many African countries. In fact, many argue that people should be encouraged to write children's books for the children of their own country. Such a statement may result from their fear of having their children corrupted with other peoples' negative ideologies or beliefs. We are not saying that writing children books for one's own country is bad, but helping children to

learn from other cultures through translated books will help them the most. Oittinen concurs with this idea as she says that "most Western societies (with the notable exception of the United States) rely heavily on translations to produce books for their children. In Finland, 80 per cent of the 1,009 titles (1997) published yearly for children are translations (Oittinen, 2000: xiii). How we feel humiliated for the French speaking African countries where translated books are few in number. It is a fact that not many books of children's literature are published annually in Africa (with perhaps the exception of Arab countries and Kenya) and many of our children are not exposed to translated literature at all.

2.4. Translating for children

The above discussion drives us to speak of *cultural context adaptation*. From this translation theory complex discourses, such as the one related to violence discussed above, can be dealt with. In practice, such discourse may require techniques such as *purification* which Klingberg often refers to.as Purification. Purification means "sanitising values in translation through deletion and addition" (Klingberg in Oittinen, 2000:90). This is done in order to make the translation easier to understand, while, at the same time, preserving the set values in the target language or culture. We assume that adapting texts for the child helps him/her read the book without struggling too much.

2.4.1. Translation as adaptation

Eugene A. Nida opens his book *Contexts in Translating* with a question: "Is translating simply the act of transferring the meaning of a text from one language into another or does it depend on some theory of similarities and contrasts between languages"(2001:1)?; To answer this question, he argues that numerous theories: linguistic, sociolinguistic, communicative, free, literal, hermeneutic, semiotic, relevant, skopos, Marxist, transformational, and gender have been developed as an indication that translation is context-based. Nida's ideas may well be applied to translating for children.

In translating children's books into other cultures, the child's voice can sometimes be translated as is in the source culture. This strategy is what we may call "foreignising", but if

this voice is silenced by translators or simply given a slightly different meaning to close the gap of lack of meaning between the two cultures, the strategy is now called "domestication" or "adaptation".

"Adaptation", as Outi Paloposki and Oittinen point out, "is not simply a question of *how* texts are translated (whether they are domesticated or foreignised), but *why* they are treated the way they are" (Oittinen, 2000:74). The question of 'adaptation' is as notorious as that of 'equivalence'. In other words, understanding the relative meaning that this notion of equivalence carries with it puts us in the position to understand what we mean by adaptation. This concept of adaptation is, in our view, a guiding principle of translation and, as many scholars have shown, a central concept in translation that one cannot ignore.

However, some scholars specialising in children's literature still argue that good translation is equivalent to the original. Yet there is no absolute equivalence between source text and target text and children's literature translation is not an exception. We do not think that translators of children's books should be required to produce something absolutely or perfectly the same as the source text, but rather something 'somehow' related to the original text, sharing with it some characteristics or neighbouring values. The translator is not expected to translate the writer's intention. His duty, thus, is to interpret this intention in such a way that it can, in turn, be interpreted correctly by the target receivers. Given this situation, equivalence cannot be expected in its absolute sense.

On this basis, it is safe to speak of "different situations in translation" instead of "equivalence," as Oittinen (2000:9) suggests. "Situation" is a word which she relates to "context" (time, place, and culture, including the individual interpreting and acting in the context). She argues that when writing or translating we are always in a situation. She makes a very important point when she adds that "situation not only involves time, place, and culture but also, or first and foremost, issues like the translator as a human being and her/his ideology" (Oittinen, 2000:10). This is true because our interpretations of texts are influenced by our prejudgments, backgrounds and literary traditions, which are all part of this situation.

Considering the above, we analyse Ngugi's texts bearing in mind the concept of "situation" or "purpose" of these texts' translations. This situation or purpose is well illustrated by Christiane Nord (1991) in her *Text Analysis in Translation.* This book describes a model of translation-oriented text analysis which includes three sets of factors: extratextual (situative: who? why? to whom?) and intratextual (what? which nonverbal elements? In which words?), as well as effect. This translation-oriented text model together with CDA and the systemic model if applied adequately to a text are a window to understanding the text in contexts or situations.

While stressing the importance of context, culture or situation, it becomes easier for us to define these two key words: "Translator", on the one hand, and "Translation", on the other. Vermeer in (Oittinen, 2000:11) points out that "a translator is a human being and a translation is an interpretation, a new text in a new culture". This definition of our main concepts is close to the idea we want to develop in this work. In practice we find this definition relevant because the original writer, his readers, translators and their readers belong to a different culture, which also makes the translations different.

With all the advantages connected with this children's literature in a continent where there are not many children's books, these books by Ngugi can still be of help to other children such as French speaking African children, for example. But since the Francophone child reader is distanced from these books in *language* (they are written in English), *time* and *culture*, the aid of the translator is needed to move the original content and message with their ideological concerns sufficiently close to the target child reader.

Although many people would not agree that Ngugi's children's books act as a force of social change, it is still our conviction that Ngugi's children's literature is good literature for children and needs to be translated into other languages. It helps the child understand the evils of mankind, especially today where we hear of reports of wars, social injustice, and the unstoppable greed of capitalists all over the world. With all these reasons in mind, it becomes clearer why we say that this literature is suitable for translation.

In this chapter 2, we have shown how ideology, language and translation are interwoven in discourse, namely at the level of (1) syntax; (2) aspects of meaning; (3) metaphors, and

others. We now proceed to analyse ideologies in Chapter Four by demonstrating how Ngugi's works can be interpreted and translated for children of other cultures. We give more details regarding the translation of children's books as we discuss the comparative analysis of Source and target texts, their shifts, norms and strategies in the translation processes.